

Joanne Austin
Area Extension Faculty
WSU Cooperative Extension
360-428-4270

PARENTS CAN GIVE THEIR CHILDREN TOO MUCH

Do your children demand only the “best”? Need constant stimulation? Fail to follow through on projects? Feel a need to be accepted by others? If so, they are exhibiting behaviors which nationally known psychologist, Bruce A. Baldwin has dubbed “Cornucopia Kids”.

This label stems from the mythical "Horn of Plenty" which is full or overflowing. A representation of the “good life” many middle class families are living. Although this lifestyle may be comfortable and cozy, it may leave children unprepared for the “real world” and adult responsibilities.

These families may not be wealthy, yet they purchase all the comforts and conveniences advertised. Well-meaning parents may find their children believe they too will have this type of life whether they work for it or not. The relationship between effort and reward has not been developed.

In his research, Baldwin found most of these parents were achievers. In fact they had to be to establish their lifestyle. Yet by giving so much to their children, they inadvertently caused their children to be underachievers.

These children were also unprepared for the real world. They experienced culture shock when they left home to live independently. The type of demands they had made to their parents did not work with other people.

To prevent or deal with “Cornucopia Kids” Baldwin suggests the following strategies:

- Give children household chores. This represents a personal contribution to the entire family.
- Refrain from giving children too much. Instead motivate children to work for what they want.
- Demand respectful and caring behavior towards others. This sensitizes children to the feelings of others and builds strong interpersonal skills.
- Instill the importance of completion. This provides the perseverance necessary to complete what is started, no matter what problems are encountered.
- Teach children to deal with failure and recognize what was learned from the experience.
- Hold children personally accountable for their actions. Only by facing the consequences of one’s actions do children learn internal limit setting and self-discipline. Avoid parental “fixing” and excuses.
- Develop money management skills. Children should learn how to save as well as comparison shop.
- Become involved in cooperative efforts where parents and children can work together on a home project. Parental patience and support are a must. Hopefully, the result of these strategies will be productive, self-reliant adults.